



## BEST PRACTICES

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# Finish strong for a good year

**W**hatever your economic outlook, ending your business year positively is important.

Avoid slipping from a good year into a so-so year by never letting your guard down. It's imperative, when things are looking up, not to ease up on the sales efforts and watch your profits slip away.

To that end, if your year has been disappointing, don't give up. You can certainly make it better with a strong focus.

There are two sides to finishing strong: revenue management and cost management. And focusing on both sides at the same time will give you the most leverage.

### Improving revenue

One of the most immediate opportunities is in upsells or enhancements. Make this a focus. Some companies run contests or give incentives to those who sell the most or exceed their targets. Give guidance to less experienced employees who might start to nickel and dime your customers by trying to oversell or sell things that clients don't need. Give them ideas or consider promotions that move inventory—these can be especially effective.

Fall is a great time to sell renovation and overseeding so lawns look great next season. Some other proactive, customer-centric ideas include: helping clients prepare for winter; offering enhancements related to drainage as a

result of heavy rains, replacing wear spots in turf and beds from wear and tear; removing plant material nearing the end of its life cycle; freshening entry areas or vacant spaces to increase property value; or reducing maintenance costs through water savings, modified irrigation or using drought tolerant plant material.

Another efficient technique is to offer discounts to get pending proposals closed if done before Dec. 31.

### Managing costs

Your best opportunity to recover savings is to productively manage your labor. For example, don't replace positions if someone leaves. You'll most likely be reducing labor as winter approaches, so it's more beneficial for crews to work some overtime than to add an inexperienced replacement who has to be laid off in a month or two. Also, a common mistake is not reducing labor quickly enough. Field managers always hang on to people too long because they think they might need them and they don't like to lay people off.

Senior management has to drive this labor reduction process or labor dollars will be wasted, either ruining a good year or adding to a bad year. You get only one chance to do it right.

Another savings area is a well-managed inventory control system. Create a detailed database of equipment assets and supplies to prevent adding unnecessary purchases or spending money you don't have.

Hold off on requests for equipment or tools that you probably can get by without. The workload is declining and with a little effort, you likely can move equipment around and postpone purchasing until next season's buildup.

For a successful yearend, you must drive the last quarter strategically. Delegating could work, but if you delegate to an employee who loses focus or gets busy, even the best intentions slip. If you own the focus, you own the results.

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